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Caring and the Teaching of English

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In this article I examine the notion of caring in the teaching of English. Many literacy scholars and teachers have called for more caring approaches to literacy instruction, and some have argued that a caring literacy pedagogy can lead both to better learning and to a better world. Central to these calls for caring pedagogy is the work of Nel Noddings; most definitions and explanations of caring literacy pedagogy rest on her formulation of an ethic of care. This article discusses Noddings's definition of caring and critiques some important aspects of her formulation, focusing in particular upon her discussion of reciprocity and her insistence that principled approaches to caring undermine relationship. I argue that, although Noddings's work has paved the way for more caring approaches to teaching, these aspects of her formulation must be reconsidered in order to ensure caring instruction for the most powerless and most needy students.

Langer's (2000) five-year study of exemplary literacy programs focuses on "the characteristics of successful English programs in which students perform better than students in programs in demographically comparable schools" (p. 398). She identifies six "cross-cutting characteristics" of schools that do an excellent job of promoting literacy development, schools that are helping students to beat the odds stacked against them by societal and cultural priorities and pressures. Five of the six characteristics have to do with teachers' professional lives, their relationships with colleagues, and their attitudes toward the profession of teaching. One has to

do with the nature of teachers' interactions with students: Langer writes that "the fifth cross-cutting characteristic of the exemplary programs is an ethos of caring (Noddings, 1984)" (p. 429).

The purpose of this article is to examine the notion of caring in the teaching of English. I begin by demonstrating that Langer (2000) is far from alone in identifying caring as essential to effective instruction in literacy; indeed, many literacy educators have called for more caring instruction in English. However, as I will also demonstrate, these calls for caring are not as helpful as they might be, in part because literacy scholars often do not say what it

is they mean by caring. When definitions or evidence of caring instruction are provided, they are often unclear or even at odds with definitions provided by others.

The most common way to address the definitional problem is to cite the work of Nel Noddings as Langer does (2000). In my view this shorthand method of definition through citation alone is problematic for at least two reasons: First, the bare citation (e.g., "Noddings, 1984") allows authors to sidestep the definition and leaves readers unfamiliar with Noddings's work in the dark; second, and perhaps more importantly, it leaves Noddings's formulation and definition unexamined. In this article I will examine Noddings's definition of caring, especially as set forth in her widely cited, influential work entitled *Caring* (1984). Both *Caring* and her subsequent publications (e.g., 1986, 1992, 1995, 2002) have been well received and have helped teachers at many levels and in many disciplines to enact more caring instruction. However, I will argue that certain aspects of Noddings's formulation of caring must be revisited and reconceived in order to realize the full potential of the ethic. Specifically, I will argue that Noddings's definition creates a separation between responses motivated by relationship and responses motivated by principle, leading inevitably to literacy instruction in which some students are cared for and some are not.

My analysis focuses in particular upon those whom Noddings refers to as the *cared-for* (the recipients or the objects of caring): What must the cared-

for bring to the caring relationship and what can the cared-for expect from the one-caring? To sharpen this focus on the cared-for, I will concentrate on Noddings's discussion of reciprocity and on the vignettes she uses to illustrate the ethic. An examination of the vignettes is particularly important, for as Smagorinsky (2002) and others (e.g., Johannessen, Kahn, & Walter, 1982; Hillocks, Kahn, & Johannessen, 1983) have demonstrated, the analysis of examples and of counter-examples is essential to the task of defining concepts. Noddings's narrative examples illuminate aspects of caring that perhaps receive insufficient attention in her more expository discussion. Both her discussion of reciprocity and her chosen vignettes reveal the dangerous powerlessness of the cared-for in a caring relationship as described by Noddings.

I am aware that my focus on Noddings's discussion of caring and her illustrative vignettes doesn't fit the traditional mold of empirical literacy research published in journals such as *Research in the Teaching of English*. However, in providing a critical analysis of certain aspects of Noddings's influential definition and by proposing an alternative, more equitable view of caring in the teaching of English, I am engaging in the kind of philosophical research that Lensmire (1997) engaged in. I believe that my approach "can be considered part of a broader teacher research effort to better understand teaching and its complexities" and that my analysis can bring "reflection to our judgments of what we think good and

bad, . . . evaluating beliefs and practices against what we think desirable" (Lensmire, quoted in Smagorinsky & Smith, 1997, p. 293).

I would like to turn now to a brief review of the role of caring in literacy instruction. Many literacy educators have concluded that caring is a desirable, even an essential aspect of the teaching of English. Critical reflection is therefore required in order to determine both what caring instruction is and how to implement it in the literacy classroom.

Caring in English Instruction

I agree with Langer (2000) that caring is essential to instruction in literacy. So do many others. For example, in an article with an eerily prescient title ("The literature of Vietnam and Afghanistan: Exploring war and peace with adolescents"), Kazemek (1996) encourages high school teachers to broaden their students' cultural and literary perspectives by pairing literature about the Vietnam war with literature about the former Soviet Union's attempted conquest of Afghanistan. His goal in encouraging the use of literature from the two wars is to promote what he calls a "curriculum of caring" (p. 6). He writes:

Increasingly, we are learning how *not* to care for any but those close to us, and these circles of care grow smaller with each random act of violence, each perceived threat to our own economic security, and each political diatribe that separates the needs of the young from the old, white from black, women from men. We are teaching our children and young adults not to care through our acts of commission and omission. (p. 6; emphasis in original)

Kazemek argues that present literature curricula are "based upon a 'drive for academic adequacy' and not a moral purpose of 'producing caring people' (Noddings, 1995, p. 366)" (p. 6). Other teachers and scholars join him in exhorting literature teachers to promote caring in their classrooms. For example, Quinn (2000) writes that teachers of English can use contemporary literature to sow seeds of understanding, to counter societal lessons of hatred, violence, and bigotry with "lessons that promote understanding and caring" (p. 100). Similarly, Miller (1997) argues that the in-depth study of multicultural literature can help English teachers to promote values of "understanding, tolerance, caring, and respect" (p. 88). And Casbon, Schirmer, and Twiss (1997) state very simply and powerfully that "caring is the key word" for reading teachers interested in promoting tolerance (p. 604).

Literature is not the only tool available to English teachers in the struggle against hatred, bigotry, and violence; the composition classroom can also be the seedbed of caring. For example, Herzog (1994) helps composition teachers think about how to care more specifically and more effectively in their planning, in their responses to student writing, and in their one-on-one interviews with students. He argues that caring instruction in composition need not preclude conflict or argument; indeed, "by bringing conflict into the . . . classroom—or rather, by making explicit the conflicts already there implicit," caring teachers can "lead students to develop public

voices and opinions that they can summon in public debates or negotiations" (p. 5). Similarly, Nelson (2000) views the composition classroom as a place where caring instruction can prepare students to exert caring influence upon the world: "There is . . . one powerful place to address the source of violence in our schools and in our culture. . . . It is just down the hall in the English department. It is the writing class" (p. 42). She believes that "language is both the source of much violence in our society and its potential cure" (p. 42) and that writing and sharing personal stories can lead people "away from violence and toward caring" (p. 46).

Although most calls for caring practice in literacy education have focused on K-12 classrooms, university faculty have also been urged to promote and enact more caring approaches. For example, in an article entitled "Does anybody really care?: Research and its impact on practice," Wollman-Bonilla (2002) encourages literacy researchers to conduct their investigations with greater care for the human beings involved in their studies and for the lasting impact of their investigations upon classrooms and communities. She writes, "Noddings (1986) suggests that we must ask ourselves, 'Who will be affected by our research and how?', and further, will our research contribute to 'the development of good persons' (p. 499) and 'maintain a caring community' (p. 506)?" (pp. 319-320).

Many researchers have recently noted that antagonism, bullying, violence, and alienation characterize many

public schools (Lemming, 1997; Noddings, 2002; Pellegrini & Bartini, 2000; Smagorinsky, 2002; Tendero, 2000) and that these problems are emblematic of antagonism and violence in homes, workplaces, and community life (Males, 2001; Smagorinsky & Taxel, 2002; Tendero, 2000). In light of these widespread troubles, a focus on caring in literacy instruction and in literacy research makes perfect sense. Many teachers of English attempt to counter the seeming inevitability of warfare, intolerance, and brutality by calling for and working toward caring instruction in the English classroom. Indeed, literacy educators all over the world share a belief in the power of texts and in the efficacy of literacy to promote caring, to curtail violence, to bring people together, and to transform communities (Benjamin & Mendonça, 1997; Freire, 1985, 1993; Puidokas, 2000; Shor & Pari, 1999; Tendero, 2000).

As a way of bringing people together to work for transformative purposes, many literacy scholars have foregrounded the notion of democratic teaching in the English classroom (e.g., DeStigter, 2001; Draper, Puidokas, Schaafsma, & Widmer, 2000; Rabinowitz & Smith, 1998; Shor & Pari, 1999; White, 2001). Because democracy is not merely a mode of government but "primarily a mode of associated living" (Dewey, 1944, p. 87), scholars seeking to promote democratic literacy instruction strongly emphasize the importance of relationships between teachers and students (e.g., Dodds Urban, 1999; Freire, 1985; Smith Layton, 2000), rela-

tionships among students (e.g., Casbon, Nelson, 2000; Schirmer & Twiss, 1997), and even relationships between students and literary characters (e.g., Rabinowitz & Smith, 1998). Indeed, caring relationships are seen as central to democratic practice in the literacy classroom. For example, DeStigter (2001) writes that, "in working toward democracy, people must consciously and deliberately foster relationships that reflect what Nel Noddings (1984) describes as 'caring'" (p. 300).

It is important to remember that the goal of scholars who promote caring literacy instruction is not simply to make students and teachers feel better or to encourage students to be better citizens, although those are surely important goals. Langer (2000) finds caring to be essential to students' academic achievement in English. Similarly, in a study of the effects of homogenous grouping in English classes, Gamoran (1993) concludes that an "ethos of caring" (p. 18) must be present if such grouping is to boost the academic performance of low-achieving students.

A Definitional Problem

Perhaps everyone would agree that caring is essential to effective literacy instruction. Perhaps everyone would also agree that caring literacy instruction has the potential to change society. But one problem with the focus on caring in the English classroom is that literacy educators are not quite sure what caring means: Some who call for caring instruction do not address the definition, while others provide vague

explanations or circumstantial evidence. Caring has become an important goal that perhaps means too many things to too many people, a "place-holder for those who wish to promote a more nurturing approach to schooling" (Schutz, 1998, p. 373). For example, Dodds Urban (2000) argues that caring means not giving up on students; Smith Layton (2000) indicates that caring means finding ways to engage students' hearts by developing community, synergy, and empathy in the classroom; and Nelson (2000) equates caring with listening. Langer (2000) cites the following as evidence of caring in exemplary programs: "In some schools, they hug each other a lot, in others they show affection more subtly. They ask each other how things are going and go beyond small talk at the coffee machine" (p. 429). She refers to a letter from a language arts supervisor to a group of teachers as "one small act of caring" (p. 430), and she describes a teacher who "maintains a caring attitude toward his students, the way he looks at them, tries to draw them out, and guides them to engage with the topics being taught" (p. 430). Kazemek (1996), in defining what he means by caring, says that "a curriculum of caring is one which helps students connect themselves to others in ever-widening circles of understanding" (p. 6); he later adds that a caring curriculum will broaden understanding of other peoples and cultures, "developing sympathy and compassion for the struggles of others" (p. 6).

I don't mean to suggest that these writers are wrong to describe listening,

hugging, or going beyond small talk as caring or that helping students to “connect themselves to others in ever-widening circles” is either uncaring or unimportant. In fact these goals and these examples of caring practice are directly in line with the National Council of Teachers of English’s evident, consistent, and staunch positions for tolerance and against ignorance, for diversity and against bigotry, for compassion and against hatred (see, for example, the July 2000 issue of *English Education*). I mean simply to suggest that, if caring is so central to effective literacy instruction and so important to students’ success as learners and as human beings, then as teachers and researchers we should be more clear about what we mean by caring instruction.

The Influence of Nel Noddings

Although literacy educators announce varying definitions of caring, one aspect of their discussions is startlingly similar: Most of them refer to the work of Nel Noddings. In fact, Noddings is a standard citation in discussions of caring in English and across the curriculum. Her insistent calls for caring (e.g., 1984, 1986, 1992a, 1995, 2002) have been well received by the academy at large and widely cited in academic journals and monographs. Eighteen years after the publication of *Caring*, one finds hortatory allusions to an ethic of care in many fields. I have seen references to the ethic in textbooks for undergraduates in social work, education, and pharmacy, among others. As Schutz (1998) notes, “Care scholars address

issues ranging from moral theory and the experience of women, to the relation between caring and critical thinking, to service learning” (p. 373). A recent practice test for the verbal section of the PSAT for high school students (College Board, 1999, pp. 6–7) presents a passage that explains the ethic of care. And in 1995, *Phi Delta Kappan* devoted an entire issue to caring education, an issue in which Noddings’s words, work, and ideas figure prominently.

It is not surprising that literacy educators refer frequently and respectfully to her work. Her scholarship is refreshing in its personal intensity and courageous in its challenges to orthodox views of teaching and learning (1984), curriculum (1992a), and character education (2002). She has initiated and helped sustain important conversations regarding authority in the classroom (1984, 2002), the role of spirituality in education (1992a, 1997, 2002), and the influence of gender upon learning (e.g., 1991; 1992b). Her long-standing focus upon caring is impressive, and her ideas have engendered substantive inquiries and conversations in highly diverse fields. As DeStigter (2001) has noted, Noddings is “the principal architect of the notion of education as caring” (p. 302). As principal architect, she (1992a) argues that schooling should be restructured to make caring the primary purpose of education; she believes “that caring is the very bedrock of all successful education and that contemporary schooling can be revitalized in its light” (p. 27). According to Noddings (1992a), “Schools

should be committed to a great moral purpose: to care for children so that they, too, will be prepared to care" (p. 64).

Many literacy educators have embraced this purpose. The fact that caring is so much a part of teachers' vocabularies and goals can be attributed in large measure to Noddings's tireless efforts. However, like Schutz (1998) I am concerned that the definition of caring has become too diffuse. A close look at Noddings's formulation of caring could help teachers and researchers to consider the notion of caring instruction in greater detail.

Caring According to Noddings *A Feminine Approach*

For Noddings, caring is an essentially feminine approach; in fact, the full title of her widely cited book is *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (1984). As both Noddings and others (e.g., Gilligan, 1982) have argued, the ethic of care is as old as the experience of women in relating to themselves, to one another, and to the world. They have also argued that, because caring is rooted in women's experience, the ethic has long been suppressed by more powerful, male-centered approaches, ideologies, and moralities. Noddings (1984) writes that caring is rooted in the more feminine attributes of "receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness" (p. 2) and that people (not just men) who have been trained to focus on abstract principles and hypothetical situations rather than on concrete relationships and real human beings tend to find more feminine, relational approaches both odd and

inferior. In developing this argument Noddings echoes Gilligan (1982), who states that some dearly-held tenets of psychological theory "have blinded psychologists to the truth of women's experience" (p. 62).

When Gilligan (1982) speaks of "dearly-held tenets of psychological theory," she is referring especially to Kohlberg's (1981) highly influential work on the stages of moral development. Gilligan writes:

In the research from which Kohlberg derives his theory, females simply do not exist. [His] six stages that describe the development of moral judgment from childhood to adulthood are based empirically on a study of eighty-four boys whose development Kohlberg has followed for a period of over twenty years. Although Kohlberg claims universality for his stage sequence, those groups not included in his original sample rarely reach his higher stages. . . . Prominent among those who thus appear to be deficient in moral development when measured by Kohlberg's scale are women. (p. 18)

Gilligan wrote *In a Different Voice* in part as a response to Kohlberg, as a way of recording "different modes of thinking about relationships and the association of these modes with male and female voices in psychological and literary texts and in the data of my research" (p. 1). She argues that women's "failure" to fit Kohlberg's model (and other models of moral development) points not to weakness or flaws in women but to the failure of existing models to address and account for women's experiences (p. 2). Although Gilligan is careful to say that the different voice she describes "is characterized not by gender but theme" (p. 2), she also associates the different

voice with the voice of women through “empirical observation” (p. 2). The “different voice” with which many women speak in response to moral problems, she would argue, is simply not heard by the traditionally privileged, more male-centered measures of morality.

Noddings (1984) followed Gilligan (1982) in identifying specifically feminine approaches to moral reasoning, as did many others. Maher (1999) points out that until very recently, most thinking about gender, even by feminists, has been “governed by the unquestioned framework of a dichotomous split” (p. 40) between male and female, “between public and private spheres, with women relegated to the home and given responsibility for caring, the emotions, morality and so forth, and men being given public lives and power” (p. 40). More recently, however, feminists have questioned the notion of the male-female split. According to Maher (1999), “One of the great contributions of post-modern approaches within feminism and other fields of social thought has been to challenge the essentialism of such binary oppositions within much of cultural feminist theory” (pp. 49-50). Benhabib (1992) lists a few of the critical questions some feminists have posed regarding the dichotomous split posited or at least implied by Gilligan and others:

Is a “different” voice really the women’s voice? Can there be a “woman’s voice” independently of race and class differences, and abstracted from social and historical context? What is the origin of the difference in moral reasoning among men and women which

Gilligan has identified? Does not Gilligan’s analysis of women’s tendency to reason from the “care and responsibility” approach merely repeat established stereotypes of femininity? (p. 191)

Scholars who ask these questions are concerned in part that the dichotomous split leads to superficial efforts at remediation, whereby caring and other issues presumed to be the province of women are merely added to the existing curriculum in such a way that they reinforce existing oppressive structures (Luke, 1992). For example, Maher (1999) joins Walkerdine (1994) in arguing that “expanding the curriculum to include ‘home and family’ topics and the values of caring, concern and connection, or even simply giving equal attention to girls in the classroom, will fail as long as the essentialized gendered dichotomy between male and female, public and private is not itself deconstructed” (p. 41).

Noddings responds to concerns regarding the dichotomous split in several ways. First, she continues to argue that the male-female dichotomy cannot be completely deconstructed. For example, she (2002) writes that “in almost all cultures, women seem to develop the capacity to care more often and more deeply than men” (p. 19). However, she reminds her readers that neither she nor Gilligan has ever argued that female-male differences in approaching and responding to moral problems are rooted in biology, that an ethic of care is exclusively female, that all women use an ethic of care, or that men cannot care (see, for example, Noddings, 1992a, p. 21 and Noddings,

2002, p. 103). Still, although Noddings (2002) stops short of saying that caring is innate or essential in women, she does say that “whether or not the tendency to care is an essentially female characteristic is an open question” (p. 19).

Noddings’s second response to her more recent feminist critics focuses on the authentically feminist lineage of her scholarship. She argues that her recognition of gender differences is supported by a deep tradition of feminist research. For example, she (1992a) writes:

Nancy Chodorow (1978) has theorized that girls and boys develop different psychological deep structures because females are almost exclusively the primary caregivers for both. Girls can find their gender identity without separating from their mother and, hence, develop a relational personality structure and perhaps even a relational epistemology or way of knowing (Keller, 1985). Boys, however, must construct their gender identity in opposition to all that is female. Here we have the possible roots of the different moral voices described by Gilligan. (p. 27)

In her most recent book, Noddings (2002) writes that her ideas are very much in line with an important stream of feminist scholarship:

The feminist perspective that I will use has a long history. It has sometimes been called “social” or “maternal” feminism (Black, 1983) and has in the past even been identified with a “redemptive” function of motherhood (see Bernard, 1975, ch. 18). . . . Contemporary feminists who have much in common with earlier maternal feminists (which is not to say there are no differences) may be found among both radical feminists (Daly, 1984) and psychoanalytic feminists (Dinnerstein, 1976; Chodorow, 1978). A few of them present arguments that strongly resemble those of their maternal feminist forebears but show

considerably more analytic sophistication (Ruddick, 1980, 1984, 1989). This perspective acknowledges that there are still substantial differences between men and women, including differences in their views on moral life. It does not, however, attribute all the differences to biology and nature but traces many of them to centuries of different experience. (p. 103)

Noddings’s (1992a, 2002) third response to her critics’ concerns about the “dichotomous split” between male and female, between public and private domains, is perhaps most impressive. It is embodied in her approach to curriculum that emphasizes the ideas, voices, and experiences of women. She recognizes the dangers of a simplistic “add women and stir” (Noddings, 2001, p. 29) approach to inclusion and argues instead for a fundamental rethinking of the purposes underlying the curriculum. If enacted, her caring curriculum (1992a, 2002) could deconstruct the apparently opposing worlds and approaches of men and women by foregrounding what had previously been thought private (the experience of women) in the public domain. As Maher (1999) notes, Noddings has shown how themes of caring and nurturance—“for self, for intimate others . . . for the natural and human-made worlds”—could transform the curriculum by tackling pressing societal needs in an interdisciplinary way (Noddings, 1995, p. 675; see also Noddings, 1992)” (p. 40).

Although some scholars have criticized Noddings for (at least) appearing to countenance a dichotomous male/female formulation, few seem to doubt her assertion that more masculine ap-

proaches to moral issues are likely to give rise to violence (Noddings, 1984, 1992, 2002) or that, as Gilligan (1982) states, women's experiences tend to "illuminate a world which psychologists have found hard to trace, a territory where violence is rare and relationships appear safe" (p. 62). An ethic of caring, argues Noddings, would promote community, compassion, and safety as an antidote to the violence plaguing schools and society.

The ethic's emphasis upon relationships and its insistence upon safety set caring apart from more traditionally privileged and more overtly antagonistic pedagogical models such as the Socratic method (Pekarskey, 1994; Rud, 1997; White, 2001). An ethic of care encourages teachers to recognize the power that has been entrusted to them and to wield it for the sake of community, not for the sake of confrontation. Careful use of pedagogical power is especially important given the unequal nature of pedagogical relationships.

Noddings (1984) writes that teacher-student relationships are inherently unequal. She argues that "a difference of status and the authorization to help prevent an equal meeting" (p. 66) and that "meetings between teacher as teacher and student as student are necessarily and generously unequal" (p. 67). For Noddings (1984, 1986), equality is both possible and desirable, but when teacher and student do meet equally, the relationship becomes one of friend to friend; and then, "when the teacher [resumes] her function as teacher, the relation becomes again, temporarily, unequal" (1984, p. 71). Gilligan

(1982) points out that such unequal but interconnected relationships ought to give rise to "the ethics of justice and care, the ideals of human relationship—the vision that self and other will be treated as of equal worth, that despite differences in power, things will be fair; the vision that everyone will be responded to and included, that no one will be left alone or hurt" (pp. 62–63).

Noddings has examined these unequal teacher-student relationships from a very important perspective. Her discussion of engrossment and inclusion on the part of the one-caring and her insistence upon reciprocity on the part of the cared-for help teachers to consider what it might mean to "meet the other morally" (Noddings, 1984, p. 5) and how they might wield power more humanely and more effectively.

Three Essential Elements: Engrossment, Inclusion, and Reciprocity **Engrossment**

"At bottom," says Noddings (1984), "all caring involves engrossment. The engrossment need not be intense nor need it be pervasive in the life of the one-caring, but it must occur" (p. 17). By engrossment Noddings (1992) means intense interest, even absorption in the life, the thoughts, and the experiences of the cared-for. It is "an open, non-selective receptivity to the cared-for" (p. 15). This intense absorption is not romantic (1984, p. 17) and it transcends empathy (p. 30): Empathy requires that I put myself in another's shoes and engage in some judgment and analysis from a distance, while engrossment leads me not to judge from afar but "to

receive the other into myself [so that] I see and feel with the other" (p. 30). In this way, engrossment brings the one-caring and the cared-for closer together so that "the one-caring, in caring, is *present* in her acts of caring. Even in physical absence, acts at a distance bear the signs of presence: engrossment in the other, regard, desire for the other's well-being" (p. 19; emphasis in original). The one-caring becomes engrossed in the cared-for as an individual, and that individual "fills the firmament" (Noddings, 1984, p. 74).

Inclusion

Engrossment allows the one-caring to receive and to *include* others, that is, to see the world through their eyes. Noddings (1984) writes that "the one-caring receives the child and views his world through both sets of eyes. . . . The one-caring assumes a dual perspective and can see things from both her own pole and that of the cared-for" (p. 63). This double vision helps the teacher to avoid separating herself from her students as if she were her students' opponent. The caring, inclusive teacher "rejects the notion of life as a contest" (Noddings, 1986, p. 388-389) and refuses to see teaching as a struggle in which her job is to force students to learn something. Instead, the teacher strives to include her students for the sake of community. Noddings (1986) writes:

We do not ask how we must treat children in order to get them to learn arithmetic but, rather, what effect each instructional move we consider has on the development of good persons. Our guiding principles for teaching

arithmetic, or any other subject, are derived from our primary concern for the persons whom we teach, and methods of teaching are chosen in consonance with these derived principles. An ethic of caring guides us to ask, What effect will this have on the person I teach? What effect will it have on the caring community we are trying to build? (p. 387)

In order to judge the likely effect of a pedagogical or curricular decision upon individuals and the community, the caring teacher includes her students, seeing the classroom, curriculum, teaching, and learning from their perspectives.

So far in this discussion of the elements of caring, all responsibility has rested with the one-caring to become engrossed in her students and to include them. As Noddings (1992a) notes, some have criticized her for placing too much of the burden on the one-caring and not enough on the cared-for (p. 17). In *Caring*, however, Noddings (1984) consistently argues that the cared-for bears great responsibility in the relationship: If the cared-for does not respond to the one-caring's efforts at inclusion, the relationship cannot be considered a caring relationship.

Reciprocity

Noddings (1984) explains that "both parties contribute to the relation; my caring must be somehow completed in the other if the relation is to be described as caring" (p. 4). What must the cared-for contribute? How does the cared-for complete the caring? First, the cared-for must recognize that he or she is cared for (p. 68); second, the cared-for must honestly receive the caring (pp. 68-69); and third, the cared-

for must respond to the one-caring by freely and spontaneously disclosing himself or herself (p. 74). These responses can take many forms:

As the infant rewards his caring mother with smiles and wriggles, the student rewards his teacher with responsiveness: with questions, effort, comment, and cooperation. . . . This responsiveness need not take the form of gratitude or even of direct acknowledgment. Rather, the cared-for shows either in direct response to the one-caring or in spontaneous and happy growth before her eyes that the caring has been received. The caring is completed when the cared-for receives the caring. He may respond by free, vigorous, and happy immersion in his own projects . . . , and the one-caring, seeing this, knows that the relation has been completed in the cared-for. (p. 181)

Noddings (1984) concludes that "the freedom, creativity, and spontaneous disclosure of the cared-for that manifest themselves under the nurture of the one-caring complete the relation" (p. 74); and she argues very cogently that students will be more likely to reciprocate, to complete the caring relationship, when carers nurture their students' entire beings, not just their linguistic and mathematical competencies. For example, Noddings (1992) calls for teachers and curriculum organizers to pay special attention to students' multiple intelligences (pp. 30-31) and to their spiritual natures (pp. 49-50).

What's Wrong with Noddings's Formulation of Caring?

As I have noted, Noddings's ideas regarding caring have been both widely cited and highly influential. Her arguments have stimulated thoughtful de-

bate and have challenged many teachers and curriculum theorists to reconsider their approaches to teaching, to power relationships in the classroom, and to subject matter. As a teacher and teacher educator, I have found her work especially informative, insightful, and provocative. Few other scholars have stimulated me to think so critically and specifically about my own teaching and my relationships with my students. However, Noddings (1997) has written of the importance of "learning how to criticize appreciatively" (p. 248), and that is what I will attempt to do in the remainder of this paper. As I have re-read *Caring* (and her subsequent, important but less frequently cited work), I have been troubled by what I think are some weaknesses in the architecture of the ethic, especially with regard to the cared-for. In the next section of this paper, I will argue that certain aspects of Noddings's formulation could place potential cared-fors in great jeopardy.

The Problem of Observable Reciprocity
Noddings plainly states that reciprocity is basic to the caring relationship: The cared-for must complete the caring relationship by responding to the one-caring. The question for teachers, then, is what to do when students seem not to respond to instruction and interventions motivated by caring. In such cases should teachers keep caring or should they withdraw? Noddings says that the one-caring, "if pushed hard enough, may withdraw her caring" (p. 48) and that one-caring "must meet the other as one-caring until he is, intentionally, a positive threat to her physical or ethical

self. Then, and only then, she *must* withdraw” (p. 115; emphasis added). Is the lack of recognizable reciprocity a hard-enough push, a threat to the teacher’s ethical self? *Must* a teacher withdraw her caring when a student refuses to reciprocate openly? A story from my own classroom might help to clarify the issues surrounding this important question.

As part of a recent sabbatical, I returned to teaching high school English full-time. On my first day back in the classroom, as my fourth hour sophomore English class was filing into the room, one of the students approached me. “Look,” he said impassively, “don’t take this personal, but I’m not doin’ nuthin’ in here.” As I opened my mouth to respond (although I didn’t know what to say, and even after all this time I don’t know what I should have said), he held up his hand to stop me and said quite earnestly, “I mean it. Nuthin’ you can do or say will change me. This has nuthin’ to do with you, so don’t take it personal, but I’m not doin’ nuthin’.” As I watched Craig shuffle to his desk in the front row, I wondered a thousand things at once. Would I be able to change his mind, to reach him somehow? How could I not take it personally? What has happened to him that he has given up at so early an age? Did he really mean it?

He meant it. In the weeks that followed, Craig spent most of every hour with his head down. He resisted all polite requests, pleading suggestions, and stern commands. He was absolutely unresponsive. His writing journal remained empty except for some

doodlings that resembled the logos of his favorite heavy metal bands. When the class was reading together, Craig’s book always sat unopened on his desk and usually served as a pillow of sorts.

I have had many students like Craig in my career as a teacher. My interactions with them have led me to many more questions than answers. I have mentioned the questions he engendered when I first met him; those questions multiplied and intensified as the days and weeks passed. How could I reach him? I couldn’t just let him sit there. It wasn’t fair to the rest of the class, to him, or to me. How could he stand it, day after day, class after class, just sitting there? What could I do to help him? Why didn’t he care about school, about grades? Why did he seem not to care about life? I did my best to engage him in conversation, to encourage him to study, to show him that I believed in him and that I expected good things from him; but try as I might, I could see none of the usual evidence of reciprocity (Noddings, 1984, p. 181). What might Noddings say about Craig’s lack of response and about my obligation to care for him?

According to Noddings (1984), lack of reciprocity is one of the greatest threats to one-caring. She writes that “our obligation to summon the caring attitude is limited by the possibility of reciprocity. We are not obliged to act as one-caring if there is no possibility of completion in the other” (p. 149). But how is a teacher to recognize the possibility of completion? Noddings argues that one-caring must use her “eyes” (p. 181) to see whether or not

the cared-for has accepted her caring, for reciprocity will be observable. A passage I quoted earlier emphasizes this point:

What the cared-for contributes to the relation is a responsiveness that completes the caring. This responsiveness need not take the form of gratitude or even of direct acknowledgement. Rather, the cared-for *shows* either in direct response to the one-caring or in spontaneous and happy growth *before her eyes* that the caring has been received. The caring is completed when the cared-for receives the caring. He may respond by free, vigorous, and happy immersion in his own projects. . . , and the one-caring, *seeing this*, knows that the relation has been completed in the cared-for (p. 181; emphases added. See also Noddings, 1992, p. 16, and Noddings, 2002, pp. 13, 28).

The problem with this emphasis upon observable reciprocity is perhaps self-evident. What happens when cared-fors cannot or will not, for any number of reasons, show their responsiveness before their teacher's eyes? For example, Wilhelm (1997) and others (e.g., Hynds, 1997) have demonstrated that many early adolescents will not express their delight in reading for fear of ridicule from their peers. Peer pressure (or violence or anger or hunger or wounds of many other kinds) might prevent or inhibit an open display of happy immersion.

It is a mistake to judge the reception of caring (or the possibility of such reception) by sight, for reception might be present but unobservable. It might take the form of quiet reflection on the bus home from school or just before sleeping. Reciprocity might also be displayed but disguised, unrecognizable: A student could reciprocate by coming to class instead of cutting or by choos-

ing not to take her own life. A caring teacher might never know what her caring has wrought in the lives of her students. In any event I am puzzled as to why Noddings (1984) says that caring need not take the form of observable *action* (p. 10) but that the cared-for must show an observable *reaction*. If teachers are obliged to care only for those who openly and visibly reciprocate through direct responses or "happy immersion," students such as Craig are in grave danger indeed.

Something is perilously wrong with the notion that, if I do not see the results I am looking for, I may withdraw my caring. I would argue that it is often the person who is least able to show a response who is most in need of caring. Whether a student's responsiveness is invisible because it has been suppressed by neglect or repeated failure or chemicals or violence or poverty, teachers must not withdraw caring because of the absence of observable evidence or because the student appears to take no initiative (Noddings, 1984, p. 181). Of a seal, Noddings (1984) writes, "Whether or not the creature is responsive, I am responsive to the *possibility* of its responsiveness" (p. 159; emphasis added). I would argue that teachers ought to be even more responsive to the possibility of a human being's responsiveness.

Schools are filled with outwardly unresponsive students, a situation that requires teachers to exercise patience and persistence in teaching and in caring. Surely all teachers have had the experience of discovering that an outwardly unresponsive student has been deeply engaged in the class and in the

subject matter. A teacher's eyes are easily fooled. Given the opportunity to withdraw caring in the absence of observable reciprocity or in the presence of outright hostility and rejection, teachers' natural, human tendency could be to withdraw caring too soon for their own self-protection and self-interest. If educators follow an ethic that allows them to withdraw caring when students fail to respond or when students' responses are unrecognizable or when teachers find the relationship overwhelmingly repugnant (Noddings, 1984, p. 102), they will too often err in withdrawing their caring, especially if they decide whether or not caring is worth it on the basis of what they see. Noddings's discussion of reciprocity seems to support the notion that teachers should care for some students and not for others, particularly those students who do not reciprocate openly and visibly.

But to say that teachers must care about every student would be to promote a rule or a principle of some kind, an approach Noddings (1984) has rejected. Although she says that she does not advocate "arbitrary and capricious behavior" (p. 25), she welcomes inconsistency,

the sort of behavior that is conditioned not by a host of narrow and rigidly defined principles but by a broad and loosely defined ethic that molds itself in situations and has a proper regard for human affections, weaknesses, and anxieties. . . . Such an ethic does not attempt to reduce the need for human judgment with a series of "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not." Rather, it recognizes and calls forth human judgment across a wide range of fact and feeling, and it allows for situ-

ations and conditions in which judgment (in the impersonal, logical sense) may properly be put aside in favor of faith and commitment. (p. 25)

The Problem of Faithless Caring

Noddings's (1984) faith in human judgment is evidently very deep. But teaching requires more than faith in human judgment and commitment to what Noddings refers to as a loosely defined ethic. Teaching also requires faith in and commitment to students, even (perhaps especially) those students who cannot or will not reciprocate noticeably. For example, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) describe "midwife teachers" (p. 217) who approach *education* according to its etymology: They draw their students' ideas out, validate them, encourage further exploration and elucidation, and validate again. Herzog (1994) notes that "one of the midwife-teacher's greatest achievements is helping students believe in the value of their contributions—and [helping them] have faith in their ability to participate. These teachers confirm their students' value and help them achieve possibilities that the students *may scarcely dare believe*" (p. 4; emphasis added). The midwife-teachers bring faith to situations in which students all too frequently "doubt their intellectual competence" (Belenky et al., p. 4).

Students who doubt themselves require the confirmation of others in order to grow and succeed (Belenky et al., 1986). According to Noddings (1984), one-caring confirms the cared-for when she "sees the best self in the cared-for" (p. 64) and then works with the student to actualize that best self.

However, in Noddings's formulation, the students most in need of confirmation might go unconfirmed. Noddings (1984) writes that the caring teacher must include a student before she can confirm him (p. 67; cf. Herzog, 1994, p. 4); that is, she must see the student and the world from the student's perspective before she can offer meaningful confirmation. If inclusion is indeed prerequisite to confirmation, some cared-fors are not likely to receive confirmation because Noddings (1984) argues that teachers need not include students who do not reciprocate openly and visibly and that teachers must withdraw from students who pose an ethical threat. Here, then, is a vicious cycle: Development of self-esteem is often prerequisite to observable reciprocity; reciprocity is prerequisite to ongoing inclusion; inclusion is prerequisite to confirmation; and confirmation is prerequisite to development (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 196). Students who have little faith in themselves, who scarcely believe in their abilities, who have serious doubts about their intellectual competence, may show scant evidence of reciprocity and hence may not receive the confirmation they need.

Although both male and female students require confirmation, Belenky et al. (1986) argue that female students are perhaps even more needy and even less likely to reciprocate openly, for "highly competent girls and women are especially likely to underestimate their abilities" (p. 196). Belenky et al. tell the story of a very bright college student who reported that she wished her professors would express more

approval of her work. The researchers asked the student "if the approval had to come from a teacher. Could it not come from within her? 'Not at this point,' she said. 'It's been so far pushed down it couldn't come back up by itself'" (p. 197). Many students' abilities and self-concepts have been pushed down so far that they cannot come back up by themselves. Indeed, too many students have been smothered and silenced by societal pressures, by powerful teachers, and by the institution of schooling.

Freire (1985) writes of people who have been imprisoned in a "culture of silence" by more powerful agents. He argues: "In the culture of silence the masses are mute, that is, they are prohibited from creatively taking part in the transformations of their society and therefore prohibited from being. . . . [T]hey are . . . alienated from the power responsible for their silence" (p. 50). Freire notes that one of the chief obstacles to effective instruction in literacy is that people are often "overcome by the myths of this culture [of silence], including the myth of their own 'natural inferiority'" (p. 50). When strong societal forces prohibit students from reciprocating freely, when alienating and degrading myths overcome students and cause them to lose faith in their own voices and their own abilities, then the *teacher* must supply the faith required to sustain teaching and learning.

As Giroux (1985) notes, Freire exemplifies this kind of faithful pedagogy:

Central to Freire's politics and pedagogy is a philosophical vision of a liberated humanity. The nature of this vision is rooted in a re-

spect for life and the acknowledgment that the hope and vision of the future that inspire it are not meant to provide consolation for the oppressed as much as to promote ongoing forms of critique and a struggle against objective forces of oppression. By combining the dynamics of critique and collective struggle with a philosophy of hope, Freire has created a language of possibility that is rooted in what he calls a permanent prophetic vision. Underlying this prophetic vision is . . . faith. (p. xvii)

Readers of Freire understand that the faith that underlies his vision is not in any established religion. Rather, he writes of "my trust in the people, and my faith in men and women, and in the creation of a world in which it will be easier to love" (1993, p. 22). He holds this faith not because of what he sees but in spite of or beyond what he sees. The world before his eyes is not yet a world in which it is easy to love; the men and women in whom he has placed his faith do not yet even "recognize that . . . they have the right to have a voice" (1985, p. 51). Still, he believes, even when his students cannot. He believes in their voices before they believe they can speak; he believes in their freedom before they even recognize their subjugation. For Freire, then, as for the writer of the New Testament Book of Hebrews, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1).

Part of the problem with Noddings's discussion of confirmation is that she leaves the burden of faith, the responsibility to see the unseen, with the student. She (1984) writes that "it is only through inclusion that the . . . teacher can practice confirmation. I must see the cared-for as he is and as he

might be—as he envisions his best self—in order to confirm him" (p. 67; emphasis added). Unlike the midwife-teachers described by Belenky et al. and unlike Freire, all of whom see what the student cannot yet see and who believe in his potential to reach beyond his own vision, Noddings's vision and, hence, her faith extend only so far as the student can see. But without confirmation from a caring teacher, some students might be unable to develop faith in themselves, to see beyond present limitations and past failures to the possibilities before them (Belenky et al., 1986; Herzog, 1994). If caring means anything, it must mean having faith in students who dare not yet believe.

The faith that motivates the midwife teachers and Freire is primarily secular, but it resonates with more religious perspectives, perspectives that also can sustain caring approaches. For example, Freire's compatriot Benedita da Silva, the Afro-Brazilian legislator who is presently the governor of Rio de Janeiro, has devoted her life to being a voice for the voiceless poor of her country. Her work among the oppressed in Brazil's *favelas*, her campaigns for literacy, for women's rights, and for land reform have earned her a growing international reputation (Benjamin & Mendonça, 1997). As an Evangelical Christian, da Silva maintains that her faith in the people, her ability to see beyond poverty and oppression to imagine great possibilities, and her practical caring for the people who live in the *favelas* derive from her faith in God. She explains:

I get my strength and religious conviction from the Bible. The Old Testament speaks of a God who fought for the oppressed and against slavery. It speaks of a God who values human beings and condemns all attempts to turn them into objects of exploitation and domination. Political issues I defend, like agrarian reform, have religious significance to me. (pp. 91-92)

The story of da Silva's work, including her literacy education programs in the *favelas*, is powerful and fascinating in part because she mingles progressive politics with serious Christianity, a mixture which draws criticism both from the political Left and from the Christian Right. With regard to her simultaneous attention to the here-and-now and the hereafter, she says, "Fine, it's okay to contemplate life after death, but let's not forget about life after birth" (p. 90).

Freire and da Silva provide two portraits of caring based on faith. One is more secular, the other more religious, but the point is that their work is supported and motivated by an ethical framework that is both caring and principled. They illustrate for educators what it can mean to continue to care even when things look bad, even when potential cared-for appear unable or unwilling to respond. And their successes can stimulate teachers' faith to continue in the face of opposition and even discouragement. If, as Noddings argues, teachers are to put aside impersonal, logical judgment in favor of faith and commitment, then they must learn to question those senses most closely tied to judgment and make a commitment to see the potential for learning and for reciprocity in all students, even

those who cannot or will not reciprocate openly and visibly.

The Role of Situational Variables

The notion that some should be cared for and others not, depending upon the one-caring's subjective responses to circumstantial and situational variables, is for me one of the weakest footings in Noddings's construction of an ethic of care (see, for example, Noddings, 1984, pp. 87-90). Caring as described by Noddings is essentially and unabashedly situational, flowing (or not) from the "subjective experience of those involved in ethical encounters" (Noddings, 1984, p. 5). Although the ethic is situational, Noddings (1984) argues that an ethic of care is not relativistic because "the caring attitude" is universally accessible (pp. 5-6) and because a commitment to care will oblige people to act as if they do care, even when they do not (pp. 83-84). Still, she says that there are "limitations in caring":

Not only are there those for whom I do not naturally care—situations in which engrossment brings revulsion and motivational displacement is unthinkable—but there are also many beyond the reach of my caring. . . . Many of us think that it is not only possible to care for everyone but morally obligatory that we should do so. We can, in a sense that will need elaboration, "care about" everyone; that is, we can maintain an internal state of readiness to try to care for whoever crosses our path. But this is different from the caring-for to which we refer when we use the word "caring." If we are thoughtful persons, we know that the difference is great, and we may even deliberately restrict our contacts so that the caring-for of which we are capable does not deteriorate to mere verbal caring-about. (p. 18)

The problem here for teachers is that most students also know that the difference between *caring* and *caring about* (or *not caring*) is great. They often know when their teachers care about them and when they don't; they know when a teacher has deliberately restricted his or her contact with them. And although Noddings (1984) pays homage to what she calls the ideal of universal caring, she also states that one-caring is free to withdraw her care "if pushed hard enough" (p. 48) or if she finds the caring situation overwhelmingly repugnant (pp. 102–103). In my view this authorization to withdraw care, to care for some and not for others, to include some and to exclude others, greatly weakens the potential of an ethic of care, especially when the decision to care or not to care springs from the well of human affect (p. 3).

The situational (or relativistic) nature of the ethic poses no problem for the teacher, for she has been invested with the greater share of power in the teacher-student relationship (Noddings, 1984, pp. 66–67, 71; 1986, p. 386). However, an analysis of Noddings's illustrative vignettes reveals that students are in great danger when teachers are free to care for some and not for others, depending upon circumstances and feelings.

Stories of Caring

In order to elucidate an ethic of care, Noddings (1984) presents several vignettes focusing on characters in supposedly caring relationships. Like all stories these vignettes are open to multiple, supportable interpretations. I

believe that the stories Noddings tells to highlight the attributes of caring and of feminine approaches to morality actually evince the relativism and the potentially destructive nature of the ethic as she describes it. She retells the story of Ceres and Persephone in order to illustrate the more feminine, more caring approach; then she retells the story of Abraham and Isaac to illustrate the horrors wrought by masculine, rule-governed cruelty. Noddings's readings of these two tales reveal her belief in the dichotomous split between female and male approaches to morality. Alternative readings of the stories might reveal that the split is really a crack in caring's architecture.

The Relational Approach:

Ceres and Persephone

Noddings calls the tale of Ceres and Persephone a "particular [example] of feminine courage in relating and remaining related" and says that it "can be interpreted beautifully to illustrate the attitude and conflicts of one-caring" (1984, p. 40). The myth explains the change of seasons: The goddess Ceres visits the earth with fruitfulness, spring, when her daughter Persephone emerges from captivity in the underworld; and when Persephone returns to Hades, Ceres withdraws fruitfulness from the earth and winter descends.

Noddings says that this story highlights the vulnerability of the one-caring, her goodness to others, her generosity, and "the munificent displacement of motivation that occurs when she is sustained as one-caring" (p. 42). Seen another way, however, espe-

cially in light of the context provided by ancient tellers of the tale, several aspects of the story undermine this interpretation and, hence, the story's usefulness as a model of caring. I believe that the myth actually illuminates the potentially destructive self-centeredness of the ethic. Ceres is a powerful goddess who allows the humans in her charge to be useful but who does not confer any power on them. As Noddings notes, Ceres blesses the human beings in the tale, "not with riches, luck, and power but with the great gift of *usefulness*" (p. 41; emphasis in original).

There is no doubt that she used them. A reading of the Homeric "Hymn to Demeter" (in press) reveals that Demeter (i.e., Ceres) responds to those within her power in decidedly uncaring ways. For example, she lies to the human beings who generously offer to help her, disguising her identity, all the while swearing that she is telling them the truth (ll. 113-173). Later, after revealing her true identity she orders them to build her a temple, to worship her, and to act lawfully (ll. 270-274). The people willingly obey, but the ancient poet relates that in spite of their generosity and obedience

Golden Demeter
sat there, far away from all the blessed ones,
waiting, wasting away with longing for her
daughter.
She made that a most dreadful and bitter year
For people on the land that feeds them, and
the earth
Sprouted no seed: Demeter, richly crowned,
concealed it.
Oxen dragged the curved plows in vain
through the fields,
But the white barley fell fruitless to the earth.

All the race of speaking folk would have been
destroyed

...
if Zeus had not observed and devised a plan.
(ll. 302-313)

When Zeus sends Hermes to discuss the dire situation with Hades, the messenger god tells the lord of the underworld that "Demeter devised a plan/to destroy the fleeting race of earth-born humans,/burying all seed in the earth. . . /She rages terribly" (ll. 351-354).

Noddings notes that Ceres cares intensely for her daughter and clings to relatedness in spite of terrible obstacles, but the ancient poem reveals that the goddess's intense caring for her daughter allows her to withdraw from the earth and from the humans who depend upon her caring. Because of Ceres's choice, winter falls hard upon everyone. The Homeric Hymn makes clear that Ceres deliberately destroyed innocent human life: It is not as if the grief stricken goddess simply failed to consider what might happen to the powerless people entrusted to her care; rather, she carefully plotted their demise. Surely this cannot be what Noddings (1984, 1992) means by *meeting the other morally*. I must believe that she is wrong when she says that the myth of Ceres and Persephone presents "the legend of one-caring as the pinnacle of feminine sensibility" (1984, p. 42).

In the case of Ceres, the unequal power relationship did not give rise to what Gilligan (1982) earlier referred to as "the ethics of justice and care . . . the vision that . . . despite differences in power, things will be fair; the vision that

everyone will be responded to and included, that no one will be left alone or hurt" (pp. 62-63). Ceres cared for her daughter but in the process she abandoned and injured multitudes.

What is one-caring to do when affect and relatedness clash with responsibility to others outside the immediate circle? Following the lead of Blum (1988), Benhabib (1992) answers this important question by arguing that issues of justice must guide and at times supercede the impulse to care:

Considerations of a universalist morality do set the constraints within which concerns of care should be allowed to operate and they "trump" over them if necessary . . . ; and considerations of care should be "validated or affirmed from an impartialist perspective." . . . The Mafia is an organization based on care and mutual responsibility toward members of one's own clan or extended family, yet this morality of care is accompanied by a morality of injustice and contempt toward the lives, dignity and property of non-group members. Theorists of care must specify the criteria according to which such clans as the Mafia are to be considered "immoral" from the standpoint of a morality of care. . . . A morality of care can revert simply to the position that what is morally good is what is best for those who are like me. Such a claim is no different than arguing that what is best morally is what pleases me most. (p. 187)

The Exclusivity of Caring

Ceres was most pleased to focus only upon Persephone, and this narrow focus illustrates another serious weakness of an ethic of caring as formulated by Noddings. The caring teacher-student relationship is exclusive; a teacher cannot care for a group of students at once. Noddings (1984) writes that "teaching

involves two persons in a special relationship" (p. 195), but the truth is that, for most teachers, teaching involves twenty or more persons in a complex web of special relationships. It is for this reason that one-caring requires more universal, more generalizable, more principled approaches to complement and guide the intense, inclusive focus on the specific situations of individual cared-for. Apart from principle, classroom community might be impossible to realize. As Schutz (1998) points out, the highly individualized nature of the ethic as described by Noddings works against the very community she wants to achieve:

Noddings's focus on the uniqueness of each individual paradoxically makes a common space where individuals might act together . . . impossible to achieve. Her avoidance of collaboration . . . is not accidental, but internal to the very structure of caring itself. (p. 377)

Noddings's praise of Ceres's devotion to Persephone at the expense of the rest of the community makes me wonder how she might advise me to respond to students such as Craig. I care for him, but he does not respond. By faith I see that he is capable of response but that his response is buried, underground. Should I focus on him as Ceres focused on Persephone, ignoring the rest of my students unless and until I can get some reciprocity from him (at least half of the time)? And if he does not respond, should I withdraw my caring even from him? In Noddings's view, if I am to continue to care for Craig, he *must* respond.

The Source of Sustenance

According to Noddings (1984), the reason why the cared-for must respond to the caring is that such reciprocity sustains one-caring. Indeed, she identifies lack of reciprocity as a major source of teacher burnout. Noddings asks,

Where is the teacher to get the strength to go on giving except from the student? In situations where the student rarely responds, is negative, denies the effort at caring, the teacher's caring quite predictably deteriorates to "cares and burdens." She becomes the needy target of her own caring. . . . [No] indirect caring can fully compensate for the natural reward of teaching. This is always found in the responsiveness of the student. (pp. 181-182)

Where is the teacher to get the strength to go on giving, to keep on caring, even when a particular student does not noticeably reciprocate? Perhaps the answer is, "from the rest of the community." Craig was not my only student; I had over one hundred students throughout the day and over 30 in fourth hour. Some of those students were very responsive and their reciprocity was indeed sustaining and rewarding. Some days, their responsiveness gave me the strength I needed to keep caring for Craig. And some members of our classroom community were also quite caring. Consider what might happen if the collective caring of the community were to turn in Craig's direction.

But what if the teacher can gain no sustenance from individual cared-fors or from the class as a whole? What if the entire classroom community fails to reciprocate? Must caring then be completely withdrawn for lack of sustenance? No. Freire (1985) and da Silva

(Benjamin & Mendonça, 1997) demonstrate, for example, that faith—for Freire, faith in humanity and for da Silva, faith in God—can sustain one-caring in the face of situational confusion, competing needs, and hostile opposition. Noddings (1984), however, rejects faith-based approaches as uncaring because she sees them as "masculine" and "principled," especially when the faith in question is faith in God (p. 44). For example, she argues that those who locate the source of their own ethicality in God are likely to be carried "farther and farther from the heart of morality" (1984, p. 104; see also 2002, p. 104).

I don't mean that Noddings would not be open to discussions of faith in the context of caring. Indeed, she has in many ways initiated the conversation by including faith-related topics in her suggested curricula (1992, 2002) and by calling for dialogue between "believers and unbelievers" (1997). In *Caring*, she retells the biblical tale of Abraham and Isaac, contrasting it with the tale of Ceres and Persephone to demonstrate that faith in God leads inevitably to horrifically uncaring results. I would like to offer an alternate reading of the story as a way of continuing the dialogue. I believe that the tale of Abraham and Isaac illustrates the ways in which the "trump" card of principle both complements and preserves caring relationships (Benhabib, 1992, p. 187).

The Principled Approach:

Abraham and Isaac

Noddings (1984) writes,

In obedience to God, Abraham traveled with his son, Isaac, to Moriah, there to offer him as a sacrifice: "And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son." (p. 43)

Noddings paints Abraham's actions as particularly male, typically subservient to abstract ethical principles and hence ultimately self-serving. In her view, Abraham has approached this life-or-death ethical decision by considering law and principle instead of relationship: "This approach through law and principle is not, I suggest, the approach of the mother. It is the approach of the detached one, of the father" (p. 2). In contrast to Ceres, Noddings finds Abraham to be coldly detached, willing to relinquish his relationship with his son, to murder him in order to satisfy an abstract principle or an invisible, imagined entity. "For the mother," she writes, "this is horrendous" (p. 43). Like Gilligan (1982, p. 104), Noddings (1984) says that Abraham's desire to be paternalistically ethical leads to ethically unjustifiable, uncaring action:

The one-caring can only describe his act—"You would kill your own son!"—and refuse him forgiveness. Abraham's obedience fled for protection under the skirts of an unseeable God. Under the gaze of an abstract and untouchable God, he would destroy *this* touchable child whose real eyes were turned upon him in trust, and love, and fear. (p. 43; emphasis in original)

As with the tale of Ceres and Persephone, a look at the broader context of the story might support an

alternate reading. For example, I would argue that the Genesis account does not indicate that Abraham was detached or aloof. Quite to the contrary, the story reveals that Abraham had desperately wanted a son: He and Sarah had tried to have children for decades, and after Sarah gave birth to Isaac, Abraham loved his son deeply (Genesis 22:2). Seen in this way, Abraham was not aloof from Isaac. He treasured him.

Indeed, I would further argue that Abraham saw his own life and future as bound inextricably to that of his son (Genesis 15:1-6; 17:21). God had repeatedly promised Abraham that He would bless him and that through Isaac in particular (Genesis 21:12) He would bless everyone on the face of the earth (Genesis 12:1-4; 15:4-5).

This point is vastly important because in Noddings's reading of the tale, Abraham believed that Isaac would die on Mt. Moriah. In the alternate reading that I am presenting, Abraham was convinced that Isaac could not die. Not yet. Abraham already knew that his God, unlike the gods of the nations in which he lived, abhorred human sacrifice; no doubt he was startled and confused by God's command to sacrifice his only son. But Abraham also knew that God would not lie to him. If Abraham's descendants were to be named through Isaac, if God's covenant with Abraham was to carry on in Isaac after Abraham's death as God had promised, then Isaac could not die as a childless young man at his father's hand. I agree with Noddings when she says that Abraham was determined to obey God at all costs, but I think she misses

Abraham's determination to trust God at all times.

As they were approaching the place of sacrifice, Abraham turned to the two servants who had accompanied him and Isaac and said, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go yonder; and *we will worship and return to you*" (Genesis 22:5; emphasis added). Because of God's promises, Abraham knew that Isaac would return with him. When Isaac asked his father why they were carrying fire and wood but no lamb to the sacrifice, Abraham replied, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son" (22:7-8). There is no indication in the story that Abraham knew when or how God would rescue Isaac, no evidence that Abraham expected to be stopped in mid-sacrifice. But his statements to his servants and to his son indicate his expectation that God would do something, his belief that God would not lie to him, his confidence that Isaac would live. With regard to Abraham's principled caring and obedience, the writer of the book of Hebrews concludes that "by faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, 'In Isaac your descendants shall be called.' He considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead; from which he also received him back as a type" (Hebrews 11:17-19).

Noddings (1984, 1986, 1992, 2002) consistently emphasizes the primacy of relationships in an ethic of care. Seen from the perspective of my alternate reading, the story of God, Abraham, and

Isaac is a story that celebrates trusting and caring relationships of the highest and deepest order. In believing and obeying God, Abraham was motivated by the kind of fidelity that Noddings (1986) advocates, not fidelity to duty or to utilitarian principle but "a direct response to individuals with whom one is in relation" (p. 385). To Abraham, God was neither abstract nor untouchable (cf. Noddings, 1984, p. 43); Abraham knew God; Abraham was God's friend (II Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8). Like the stories of Benedita da Silva, Mother Theresa, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and many others, the story of Abraham and Isaac can illustrate that extraordinary caring and extraordinary relationships may result from extraordinary devotion to principle, even religious principle.

Noddings's formulation of caring places a dangerous separation between relational and principled responses. The tale of Ceres reveals that caring apart from principle can lead to terrible, murderous cruelty, whereby some are cared for and others are destroyed; and the story of Abraham reveals that a successful outcome could depend upon holding both principle and relationship together.

My emphasis upon the importance of principle should not be seen as a return to Kohlberg's (1981) system, for I agree with Benhabib's (1992) critique of Kohlberg's focus on *generalized others* as opposed to *concrete others*. Benhabib (1992) writes:

In contemporary universalist moral psychology and moral theory, it is the viewpoint of the "generalized other" that predominates. . . .

[T]he very language in which Kohlbergian dilemmas are presented incorporates these epistemic restrictions. For example, in the famous Heinz dilemma, as in others, the motivations of the druggist as a concrete individual, as well as the history of the individuals involved, are excluded as irrelevant to the definition of the moral problem at hand. In these dilemmas, individuals and their moral positions are represented by abstracting from the narrative history of the self and its motivations. Gilligan also notes that the implicit moral epistemology of Kohlbergian dilemmas frustrates women, who want to phrase these hypothetical dilemmas in a more contextual voice, attuned to the standpoint of the concrete other. (pp. 160–161)

Benhabib (1992) rejects Kohlberg's narrow focus on generalized others as severely limiting, in part because "moral situations, like moral emotions and attitudes, can only be individuated if they are evaluated in light of our knowledge of the history of the agents involved in them" (p. 163). What, then, is one-caring to do when faced with competing, contradictory, incompatible needs among the human agents, the concrete others involved in moral situations? In such cases, Benhabib (1992) argues, "one needs principles, institutions and procedures to enable articulation of the voice of 'others'" (p. 168). In other words, Benhabib's critique of Kohlberg should not be read as an outright rejection of principled approaches, for she does not think "that a moral theory adequate to the way of life of complex modern societies can be formulated without some universalist specification of impartiality and the moral point of view" (p. 180). For her, the more situational focus of an ethic of care and the more principled focus of

the ethics of justice are "complementary and not antagonistic" (p. 180).

Models of Principled Pedagogical Relationships

Literacy educators who are interested in promoting more caring approaches to instruction need an ethic that can help them to deconstruct the dichotomous split between relational and principled approaches, and they need models who can show them the interdependent transaction of principle and personal relationship. I have already argued here that Freire and da Silva could serve as models in this regard; and I have argued elsewhere (White, 2001) that Jesus's principled determination to invite and maintain personal and pedagogical relationships with resistant and reluctant learners sets Him apart from other ancient pedagogical models such as Socrates, who sacrificed relationship at the altar of principle.

But one need not turn to the famous for models. Casey (1993), for example, provides compelling portraits of teachers whose names are not widely known but who are nonetheless remarkable for how they care for others in principled ways. She introduces women teachers (secular Jewish women teachers, Catholic nuns, and African-American women teachers) whose devotion to social justice gives rise to compelling relationships and whose relationships with concrete others motivate them to act according to principle. Casey's study is especially compelling because in her analysis she preserves the voices of the women as

they speak for themselves. And they speak often of the role of principle in their lives as teachers and in their relationships with others. Because the teachers speak so frequently of the principles undergirding their lives and their teaching, Casey concludes that she cannot tell the women's stories without addressing their moral imperatives. She writes, "As the open-ended structure of the narratives allowed women to introduce subjects of major importance to them, I began to hear recurrent allusions to their religious upbringing or to their moral values and motivations" (p. 29).

Secular Jewish Women Teachers

For example, the secular Jewish women teachers in Casey's (1993) study enunciated pedagogical motives associated with the principles of socialist politics (p. 74). Casey writes:

Before, during and after college, as students, as teachers, as neighbors, and as parents, these women act upon the pressing problems of their immediate social context; and, since they have spent so much of their lives in educational environments, their narratives present a kind of catalogue of recent progressive struggles over schooling in America. (p. 78)

These women's discussions of their involvement in the Civil Rights movement and the anti-war movement of the 1960's make clear the ways in which their political projects have also been educational projects. For example, in the words of one woman,

Why I'm in education and why I wanna be is . . . to change the world. And to change it with these kids. . . . I think my view of the world is that some people have been put down and left out, politically, economically, psychologically, and I think that I could be

someone who could go there and start a few kids and make them not be that way anymore. And that's my idea of politics. And that's my view of the world, and I want to basically make people feel that they're stronger and freer and I think teaching is the way to do that. (p. 88)

Young people who have been "put down and left out" politically, economically, and psychologically could very well find it impossible or undesirable to reciprocate or respond openly to this teacher's caring. Her desire to care for them is fueled, however, not by the students' reciprocation but by her principled convictions, by her view of politics and of the world: If the students do not now feel strong enough, she will work to strengthen them; if they do not yet feel free, she will attack their chains.

Of course, not everyone wants children to feel that they're stronger and freer; the women's narratives highlight the fact that their principled approaches to education have been resisted by some administrators and other powerful agents in society. They tell of the ways in which they have sometimes had to care for their students secretly, even subversively.

Their narratives also emphasize the ways in which their devotion to the principles of progressive politics led them to form powerful, ongoing relationships with others; for them, "teaching provided a continuity of their social networks" as well as "an extension of their ongoing political projects" (Casey, 1993, p. 80). Casey notes that the women's "social relations are influenced by, and in turn, influence the ongoing work," including important social relationships with other teachers

(p. 98). In their narratives the teachers also discuss the ways in which their lives have been permanently transformed through relationships with their students. Casey notes that “when the women in this group talk about their relationships with their students, what is described is more than simple political advocacy; the predicaments of these children and adolescents become an integral part of the teachers’ own identities and perspectives” (p. 101). One of the teachers emphasized that her political principles, expressed through her teaching, led to lasting relationships: “I still have kids, who are in their thirties now, from that time, who I am in contact with, or people who look me up” (p. 103).

Catholic Nuns

It is interesting that the Catholic nuns whom Casey interviewed expressed many of the same principled (political) motivations as the secular Jewish women teachers did and that both groups shared a determination to act according to principle in the face of resistance. Both groups also shared a dedication to forming and sustaining caring pedagogical relationships.

Unlike the secular Jewish teachers, the nuns in their interviews referred frequently and specifically to their religious convictions and provided examples of the interplay among faith, justice, and relationships in their lives. They spoke of the transformative power of their own religious conversions (e.g., pp. 32–33) and of the ways in which their devotion to God, religious prin-

ciple, social justice, and teaching are inextricably linked (p. 34; 36–37). Casey notes that, as the nuns named themselves and identified their principled motivations for teaching and for other kinds of social action in the world, “moral imperatives are explicitly evoked throughout the narratives” (pp. 47–48).

The moral imperatives evoked by the nuns impelled them to create and to sustain caring relationships, a caring community from which no one is excluded. As one Sister noted,

And, if there’s anything religious people, religious women have really experienced, it’s community. How *all kinds* of us from all different attitudes and walks come together, and we make a home for each other. We have some sisters in our order, I thought, “How the hell did they ever get here!” I mean *come on!* But they were part of us. And we included them. (p. 51; emphasis in original)

Acceptance in the Sisters’ community is not based upon merit or solely upon what a person can add to the collective relationship. Each one belongs, each is included simply because each is human, because each is worthy. In speaking of a mentally challenged Sister whose intellectual difficulties rendered her unable to participate in much of the community’s academic life, another Sister remarked:

She wasn’t of an intellectual caliber that she could feel like she belonged. Except. . . she did belong. . . . It was good for the rest of us, because we learned. We learned compassion. We learned, compassion is not pity. Compassion is solidarity with people. Based on the fact that we’re both people. Without any other conditions. It’s standing with people in their suffering or in whatever, you know. And that’s good, you have to learn that. (p. 52)

In their interviews the Sisters extended this notion of the compassionate, inclusive community to their classrooms as well, creating what Casey (1993) describes as “a narrative parallel between [their] feelings towards members of [their] religious congregation and [their] relationship with [their] students” (p. 54). Many of the nuns characterized these personal, professional, and pedagogical relationships in familial terms, emphasizing the importance of Christian, “brotherly” love—the selfless love demonstrated and inspired by God (*agape*)—in the pedagogical community.

Although Noddings (1984) argues that caring relationships can be sustained only when the cared-for responds openly, and that one-caring must withdraw her caring in the face of an ethical or physical threat, the nuns provide powerful examples of the ways in which caring relationships and caring action may be sustained through devotion to religious principle even when faced with the potential of violent hostility. For example, one Sister told of traveling to Nicaragua to bring attention to and to protest the “socially caused deaths” occurring there (p. 44). Her account makes very clear that the threat she faced was real, that her life was in danger as a result of her principled protest, and that certain elements in Nicaragua were not open to receiving and reciprocating her caring action. She was afraid to go. In fact, before she left for Central America, she told her friends that she fully intended to run away if anybody aimed a weapon at her. However, once there, when soldiers at the

border *did* threaten her life, she found that her principled intentions to act as one-caring were sustained by her faith:

And I remember thinking [about my intentions to run away] when I was at the border. I started to laugh to myself thinking, “God, all the things I said before I came here.” And it was like, I just wanted to say, “Shoot me if you want. But you’re not going to destroy what we believe in, the power of Christ is so much stronger than those bullets and everything else.” . . . And we shared as a group afterwards, and everybody agreed. Everyone was really afraid. But that fear was overcome with courage and it was an experience of what we read in, you know, Paul, when he says about the power of the risen Christ is in you. It was a real, I mean, a power that was within, that gave me strength to stand there, that’s the resurrection power. (p. 45)

Walkerdine (1990) has written that women teachers are often called upon to sacrifice themselves for their students and for male-dominated administrations. Does the obviously sacrificial focus of some of the nuns’ narratives provide more fodder for that anti-feminist cannon? Are their stories supportive companions to Silverstein’s (1986) *The Giving Tree*, encouraging women to completely disregard their own well-being as they promote the welfare of others? I think not. The nuns’ stories, like the stories of the other women in Casey’s study, indicate that these women teachers were themselves sustained in their efforts at caring, especially through their relationships with other carers. Note, for example, the emphasis upon the *group* of carers at the Nicaraguan border in the above narrative. Note, too, this Sister’s sustaining reliance upon her faith in God in tremendously threatening circum-

stances. I agree with Noddings (1984) when she says that the one-caring must be sustained in her caring or else burnout will result; but the stories of these women provide evidence that, contrary to Noddings's (1984) assertion, sustenance for the one-caring need not come from the cared-for, and that self-preservation need not impel one-caring to withdraw from those who do not reciprocate openly. The nuns in Casey's study demonstrate the ways in which caring relationships may be motivated and sustained through devotion to religious principle and through relationships with others, even when cared-for do not reciprocate, even when caring means facing hostile rejection.

African American Women Teachers

The African American women teachers in Casey's study also lived and taught in decidedly hostile circumstances. Although some of these women spoke of the religious basis of their political beliefs (p. 142), most of them expressed less overtly religious but not less principled motivations for their caring actions and relationships. For example, one African American woman told of becoming a teacher in the 1960s as part of a collective effort to "raise the race" (p. 131). She added, "This was our whole life, you know. And we weren't just individuals; we were really part of that whole movement" (p. 131). As part of the collective movement to raise the race, these women saw "the need to become an educated woman [as being] virtually identical with the imperative to become a teacher" (p. 129). Their principled motivation to teach led

them to enter into relationships with their students, with other activists, with the African American community as a whole, and with the larger society. As was true of the secular Jewish women and the Catholic nuns in Casey's study, some of the relationships these African American teachers formed were oppositional and personally threatening while some were deeply unified.

As was also true of the nuns, some of those principled relationships developed by the African American teachers became so close and so caring that the teachers thought of and referred to non-family members as family. Casey (1993) writes:

In these, as in many other life stories of black women, the "theme of family and family unity found in the female slave narrative is transformed and expanded into an ideal of service to others" (Braxton, p. 48). In an interesting variation of this trend, one woman, whose father, mother and grandmother died when she was a teenager, states that she had "no idea" of becoming a teacher. After attending a black college in the South, becoming a secretary, and moving to New York City, she was persuaded to teach in her own neighborhood "as an example to black children." Reincorporated into the black educational lineage, she talks about her students as if they were her own children. (p. 131)

Like their secular Jewish and Roman Catholic counterparts, these African American women understood that their principled motivations for teaching were leading them to forge family-like relationships with people who had been put down and left out economically, politically, and psychologically; they knew that "the imperative to become a teacher" included a call to stand with others in their suffering.

Perhaps because of their own harsh, sometimes heart-breaking, sometimes hardening experiences with prejudice and discrimination, these women seem especially eager to care for those who have been beaten down by injustice, children and adults who might find it nearly impossible to reciprocate openly. As one of the women noted, her personal experience as a member of a proud and loving family in the midst of terrible poverty taught her that caring can thrive even in an oppressive environment: "Growing up in an environment that was so racist and growing up in an environment that was so *poor*, economically, you had to be rich in something. We were rich in ownership, and we were rich in caring" (p. 116; emphasis in original).

But of course, that caring richness often did not accompany them beyond the schoolhouse door, where they were often deliberately and cruelly excluded. These teachers' experiences of personal exclusion led them to a deep, and deeply principled, determination to *include* everyone, even at great personal risk. For example, Casey tells of one woman who, "during an intensely acrimonious, racially polarized teachers' strike . . . seized control of the building in which she worked" (p. 146); she kept the school open for the children, contrary to administrators' orders and in spite of bomb threats. Two other women exemplify this determination to care for the neediest students, those perhaps least able to reciprocate: One teacher told of her experiences working as a volunteer literacy educator in a local

prison, where she encountered male inmates who had been left out and left behind by society at large and by the public schools in particular; and another very forthrightly said, "I am not very forgiving of teachers who do not address the needs of *all* their students" (p. 149; emphasis added), referring especially to the needs of "very needy black students" (p. 149). For these women, caring for all of our students is a matter of principle and a matter of faith: They believe that their struggle is worthwhile, that one student at a time, together they will "raise the race."

Kohlberg (1981) argues that generalizable, universal principles are to be applied to moral dilemmas without much regard to the specific circumstances of the individuals involved; Noddings (1984), on the other hand, argues that motivation according to principle must be antithetical to caring relationships and that the only caring way to approach a moral dilemma is to focus completely on the individual and on situation-specific circumstances. But Casey's (1993) interviewees demonstrate the desirability and the possibility of teaching motivated by both principle and relationship, of relationship arising out of principled caring, of principled action arising from caring relationship, and of caring relationships sustained not by observable reciprocity but by faith. Again and again their stories reveal that principle, sometimes secular, sometimes religious, sometimes a mixture of the two, can be the foundation for caring relationships and action both in the classroom and in the larger world.

Credo

I agree with Langer (2000) and my other colleagues who have called for more caring instruction in English. I believe that caring teachers and caring relationships are essential to students' academic and personal growth. And because caring is so important, I believe that teachers must be careful in defining what they mean by caring. Noddings's (1984) formulation and her suggestions regarding caring instruction and curricula (1992, 2002) have helped teachers to consider the nature and the importance of caring in the classroom. In this article I have tried to shore up some essential aspects of caring's architecture. For I believe that Noddings's discussion of reciprocity and her readings of her illustrative vignettes could encourage teachers to countenance a dichotomous split between relationship and principle, an opposition that will finally lead to uncaring instruction, to classrooms in which some are cared for and some are not. I further believe that teachers who seek to enact caring instruction must act in faith, seeing beyond the physical and readily observable actions and reactions of students. When we as teachers care and our students do not or cannot reciprocate, we can believe. As teachers, we must believe.

DeStigter (2001) writes that teachers should commit

to maintaining a patient, perhaps even relentless attentiveness to students' diverse and unpredictable needs and interests. This unremitting attentiveness might best be called a "ministry of presence." I chose the word "ministry," with all of its religious connotations, deliberately and unapologetically. For regardless of our own faith traditions—or lack of them—the kind of commitment I'm talking about requires, I think, an ethical foundation that is the shared cornerstone of all the world's great faith traditions. And to be sustained, it requires a sense of a larger purpose, a sense that we and our efforts are part of something bigger than ourselves. (p. 312)

These are the essential aspects of caring in the classroom: relentless attentiveness to all students in their unique circumstances; faith that sees beyond their (and our) immediate reactions and responses; a principled, ethical foundation to guide, guard, and support relationship with each student. Apart from these essential aspects, literacy educators could define what is best morally as "what pleases me most" (Benhabib, 1992, p. 187). But when a focus on concrete others transacts with a focus on guiding principle, as teachers we will be more likely to see beyond what is readily observable, to recognize that caring instruction in literacy is bigger than ourselves.

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